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ABSTRACT

An experimental project was implemented to test the effectiveness of full inclusion of students with learning and behavioral disorders at a rural middle school within the Appalachian region of Kentucky. Thirteen students with behavioral disorders or learning disabilities were placed in four regular classrooms for 3 months. Five teachers participated in the project and received training prior to the project. Adapted curriculum and instructional procedures, and classroom behavior management strategies were applied. Routine collaborative activities were organized during the process. It was found that students with behavioral disorders or severe learning disabilities could not benefit academically and behaviorally from the full inclusion service provided in the project, and the learning of students without disabilities was affected because instructional plans could not be accomplished. However, full inclusion appears to be appropriate for students with mild learning disabilities. This study addresses a basic issue: the necessity for schools to provide quality educational services to students with and without disabilities in inclusion practice. Contains 39 references. (Author/TD)

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A Field Test of A Full Inclusion Project

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A FIELD TEST OF A FULL INCLUSION PROJECT

Abstract

An experimental project was implemented to test the effectiveness of full inclusion of students with learning and behavioral disorders at a rural middle school within the Kentucky Appalachian region. Thirteen students with behavioral disorders and/or learning disabilities were placed in four regular classrooms for three months. Five teachers participated in the project and received training prior to the project. Adapted curriculum and instructional procedures, and classroom behavior management strategies were applied. Routine collaborative activities were organized during the process. It was found that students with behavioral disorders and/or severe learning disabilities could not benefit academically and behaviorally from the full inclusion service provided in the project, the learning of the students without disabilities was affected because instructional plans could not be accomplished. However, full inclusion appears to be appropriate for students with mild learning disabilities. This study addresses a basic issue: the necessity for schools to provide quality educational service to students with and without disabilities in inclusion practice.

A FIELD TEST OF A FULL INCLUSION PROJECT

The Regular Education Initiative (REI), as was introduced in the 1980s, promotes placing all students with disabilities totally into the general education program, in order for them to avoid the stigmatization, segregation and expense that special placements incur (Silver, 1991; Wang, 1987; Wang, Reynolds & Walberg, 1988; Wang, Rubenstein & Reynolds, 1985; Wang & Walberg, 1988). The REI-inspired movement in the 1980s has brought notable impact upon general education, and changed special education in places like Utah (Kulik, 1993) and Vermont (Thousand & Villa, 1990).

However, the implementation of the REI appears to be less uniformly guided. Some programs reflect real collaboration between special education and general education, whereas in other instances, educational administrators seem to disagree with the REI concept, and they have placed all students with disabilities in general program with little collaboration supporting their instructional needs and services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The latter practices are known as the full inclusion movement.

Supporters of this movement argue that full inclusion facilitates friendships, helps special needs students develop interpersonal skills in regular classroom settings, and also helps establish a classroom climate that encourages peer interaction (Bergen, 1993). To the leaders of this movement, social development or social competency seems to be the main goal

of this movement (Bergen, 1993; Kubicek, 1994; Reganick, 1993; Vandercook, York, Sullivan, Montie & Wolff, 1993).

While REI still emphasizes preventing academic failure, and stresses academic standards and accountability, the goals of the inclusionists are seen as focusing on abolishing special education by razing its organization and structure, eliminating the continuum of services and/or placements, and promoting solely social competence and friendships (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

This movement has raised serious concerns among many educators about the education students with disabilities receive in the public schools: full inclusion may generate compromises in the values of educational excellence and efficacy (Kauffman & Hallanhan, 1995; Reganick, 1993; Smelter, Rasch & Yudewitz, 1994, 1995); it may undermine the service delivery system for individuals with severe learning disabilities; and it fails to differentiate learning disabilities from other types of learning problems (Mather & Roberts, 1994). Maloney (1995) observes that the drive for full inclusion has proven disastrous for certain learning disabled students who need alternative instructional environments, different teaching strategies, and special materials. Restricting all students to the same learning environment is considered legally and morally indefensible (Smelter, Rasch & Yudewitz, 1994). Arnold and Dodge (1994) argue that districts need not educate every disabled child in a regular classroom for the entire day but have numerous options, so long as each child is carefully evaluated. It is imperative, Tomey

(1995) observes, that the IEP focus on meeting the students' unique needs, or inclusion take a responsible approach.

Shanker (1995) notes that most states and school districts are adopting full inclusion to save money. Requiring all disabled children to be included in regular classrooms is both unrealistic and downright harmful to the disabled children because they are supposed to participate academically and socially without disrupting other students' learning. Wigle, Wilcox and Manges (1994) point out that inclusionists are overlooking such elements as the requirement that delivery of services be appropriate for the individual student, that a continuum of alternative placements be available, that the educational rights of nondisabled students not be overlooked, and that general educators be effectively prepared. Effective inclusion involves such carefully engineered programming that it might be better described as a model than merely a placement (Phillips, 1995). Critics also offered evidence of the effectiveness of special education and note that court litigation has recognized that separate is not always unequal (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995).

With regard to full inclusion, literature abounds with position statements (Catlett & Osher, 1940,), philosophies, principles (Fox & Williams, 1991), guidelines and manuals (Jorgensen, 1995; Passaro, Guskey & Zahn, 1994; Shrag, 1993; Steinback & Steinback, 1990; Steinback, Steinback & Forest, 1990; York, Vandercook, Macdonald & Wolff, 1989). However, few studies exist on the efficacy of full inclusion programs for the broad

range of students with various disabilities. This limited number of studies indicate mixed results. For elementary students with mild disabilities, females showed greater achievements in reading comprehension than male students (Fuller, Ronning, VanVoorhis & Moore, 1993); elementary students with severe disabilities showed positive outcomes only in social interaction areas (Vandercook, York, Sullivan, Montie & Wolff, 1993); for high school students with severe disabilities, the special class model instead of the full inclusion program received highest rating for quality of IEP, and both models showed identical amount of reciprocal interactions (Beckstead, Hunt, Goetz & Karasoff, 1992). As for the effects on teachers, inclusion of students with severe disabilities did not produce entirely new effects on regular classroom teachers, but generalized attitudes, philosophies and practices that had existed in the school (Rainforth, 1992).

Research findings also reveal that administrators lack knowledge of special education laws and that endorsement of full inclusion did not require a knowledge of special education (Monteith, 1994). Literature shows that overall teachers' attitudes were negative toward full inclusion (Fishbaugh & Gum, 1994), particularly special education directors and teachers were opposed to full inclusion of students with behavior disorders (Cates & Yell, 1994).

Presently the full inclusion movement appears to have become the current trend in special education in this country (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Mather & Roberts, 1994; Rodriguez & Tompkins, 1994;

Sailor, Gerry & Wilson, 1990;). The rhetoric of this field has now become increasingly strident (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). While this full inclusion practice is spreading fast throughout this country, which is also seen in many rural schools, whether full inclusion practice is effective remains a vital issue, also whether the educational needs of students with behavioral disorders and/or severe learning disabilities are met when they are fully included constitutes a legitimate and serious concern to be addressed.

The purpose of the study is to investigate whether full inclusion service is effective for students with behavior disorders and learning disabilities. Specifically, it is to examine whether fully included students with learning disabilities and behavior disorders benefit from such service academically and behaviorally, and whether students without disabilities in fully included classrooms benefit from full inclusion academically.

Method

In August of 1995, some personnel from the Kentucky State Department of Education gave a presentation about full inclusion practice to the educational staff of a middle school located in eastern Kentucky within the Appalachian region. At the beginning of the fall semester of 1995, the principal of the middle school considered full inclusion a good idea and worth a try. Then annual review meetings were held and parents of the students in

the school's LBD program participated in the meetings. Reasons of placement change (place students in the LBD program in regular classrooms) were explained to the parents and they agreed to such changes and signed on the contract forms of Notices Of Proposed Or Refused Action. It was agreed to all parties at that time that this full inclusion program would be conducted as a one-year experimental project of the school, thus the IEPs of participating students were not changed because of this placement change. This project did not include students with severe physical disabilities and cerebral palsy.

Full Inclusion Project

Subjects

Thirteen students with learning and behavioral problems participated in this project. All were Caucasians. All were from lower income families. Of the 13 students, 5 were identified as BD, 5 with severe reading disabilities, 3 with mild reading and math problems. Three of them were 8th graders, 10 were 7th graders.

They were placed in four classrooms. The five students with BD were spread in different classrooms. No more than three students with learning disabilities were placed in one classroom.

Participating Teachers

Five teachers participated in this project. The participating teachers called themselves as a Collaboration Family.

Special education teacher: male, Caucasian, certified in LBD, three years teaching experience in special education;

Teacher A: male, Caucasian, teaching language arts, three years teaching experience;

Teacher B: female, Caucasian, teaching social studies, nine years teaching experience;

Teacher C: female, Caucasian, teaching math, 12 years teaching experience;

Teacher D: female, Caucasian, teaching science, 14 years teaching experience.

Procedures

The experimental full inclusion project utilized a collaboration-multiple treatments design. The collaboration occurred among the special education teacher, regular education teachers, parents and the school principal. The treatments include adapted curriculum and instructional procedures, individualized instruction and/or tutoring, group instruction, classroom behavior management strategies, and teacher preparation. Data from an inclusion program are provided as follows for comparison between the outcomes of the full inclusion project and the inclusion program. The entire process includes the following.

Project goals.

The fully included students with disabilities would fit in, participate and learn successfully in the daily instructional activities, would not disrupt the routine instructional activities in the regular classrooms, and students without disabilities would learn without much disruptions.

Teacher preparation.

At the beginning of the project, preparation of the regular education teachers for full inclusion was provided by the special education teacher, which included the following:

1. All participating teachers were provided with copies of students' IEPs and background information.
2. They received a list of classroom behavior management strategies: positive reinforcement, dealing with crisis situation, how to talk to student about inappropriate behavior, contract system, providing responsibility in classroom.
3. They were informed about necessary adaptations of academic expectations and curriculum designs for these students.
4. They participated in an inservice on due process, confidentiality, IEP development, regular education teacher's role in helping special needs students, and implementation of IEP for each included student.

Special education teacher.

In the process of the project, the special education teacher provided individualized or small group help to each included student with disability in regular classrooms. He mainly helped them in content learning and study skills. He spent approximately 200 minutes per week with each student. The special education teacher spent 100 percent of his instructional time during the project in the fully included classrooms.

He attended the routine weekly Collaboration Meetings addressing curriculum adaptations for the included students and classroom management issues with the regular education teachers.

Regular education teachers.

All participating regular education teachers did the following instructional adaptations for the included students during the process of the project:

1. Seat the student in the best possible place to promote listening skills;
2. Provide the student study sheets with terms or facts needed for quizzes and tests;
3. Provide daily summarization of each lesson's key points both orally and visually;
4. Use concise statements or simplified vocabulary to ensure maximum understanding;
5. Allow students to restate directions to ensure understanding;
6. Give more time to complete assignments;

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7. Reduce workload (homework, seatwork) but give full credit;
8. Provide reading material on student's actual grade level;
9. Provide opportunity to prepare on oral presentation;
10. Let students take test orally;
11. Let students use illustrations in the writing projects;
12. Allow lower standards for acceptable work quality.

All participating regular education teachers utilized the following classroom behavior management strategies with the included students in their classrooms:

1. Positive reinforcement;
2. Dealing with crisis situation;
3. How to talk to student about inappropriate behavior;
4. Contract system;
5. Providing responsibility in classroom.

Collaborative activities.

The participating teachers met once a week routinely to discuss problems related to the included students and suggestions were made during these meetings. Most of the parents participated in 90 percent of these weekly meetings, during which they usually made suggestions on what to do with their child. Parents of two students with BD requested the teachers to send homework routinely by mail to their homes and monitored their children to finish the home work assignments. The teachers did so as requested during the entire process. The principal was briefed

about what was going on once every two weeks. During the briefings, he made suggestions about what to do for the included students.

Project duration.

Beginning in early September of 1995, the full inclusion project ended in late November, lasting three months.

Main reasons to discontinue project.

1. Parents of students with BD requested that their children be placed in a resource room program.
2. Participating regular education teachers could not accomplish their instructional plans, because they had to pay attention to the fully included students in their classroom for too much time every day.

Inclusion

Beginning in late November, 10 of 13 students with severe learning and behavioral problems were pulled out and placed for most of the school time in the resource room with the special education teacher. Three students with mild reading and math disabilities remained in the regular classrooms. These 10 students still attended Music, Computer, Art, Health, and PE class with their peers without disabilities, following the same school schedule.

Procedures

During the three weeks (the first three weeks in December of 1995) in the resource room, the 10 students (5 with behavior

disorders and 5 with severe learning difficulties) spent 40 percent of their time there on academics, 60 percent of their time there on social skills training and behavior modification activities.

The academic curriculum for the 10 students in the resource room focused on hand-on activities, integrating science, math, social studies, reading, writing, and communication activities. Most of the time, the students worked on group projects. The special education teacher used direct instruction, guiding and facilitation methods in these activities.

For the social skills training component, the special education teachers taught: how to talk to other people, how to take turns, how to deal with crisis situation. The students were also working on a contract system: students earn privileges on appropriate behaviors, losing privileges for inappropriate behaviors.

Results

Full Inclusion Project

The experimental full inclusion project was discontinued three months later. The school principal decided that the full inclusion project did not meet its goals, and there was no need to continue this project. In late November of 1995, initiated by the school principal, all relevant parties (the principal, participating teachers, and parents) met and agreed to discontinue the project. The decision was made based on the

following findings about the project, reported by all participating teachers.

1. Even with all the instructional modifications provided, 40 percent of the students did not do their work at all in the regular classrooms, few of them ever finished the assigned work, even with individualized help from the special education teacher.
2. Most of them disrupted instructional activities on a continuous basis--every day: they disrupted instructional activities three times per day per person on average.
3. They showed discipline problems inside and outside the home classrooms.
4. No complaints were made to the school personnel by the parents of students without disabilities during the three month full inclusion period.

Inclusion

Three weeks after the inclusion program was implemented, the special education teacher reported the following findings, which were not much different, according to the special education teacher, from those prior to the full inclusion project:

1. All students in the resource room program participated in instructional activities 100 percent of the time; they played their roles well in the group projects; they cooperated well.
2. No serious disruptive behaviors of the students were

found in the resource room; they attended class on time; during instructional time, students were quiet and paying attention to the teacher.

3. All of the students raised hand before talking in class.
4. No discipline problems of the 10 students had been reported by Computer, Art, Music, Health or PE teacher.

Discussion

The findings from the experimental full inclusion project of the middle school indicate that even provided with various instructional adaptations and individual help, the students with severe learning and behavioral problems could not benefit from such arrangements. In the regular classrooms, these students with severe behavioral and learning problems were taught with the curriculum basically designed for students without disabilities but with some adaptations which are typical practices in inclusion. This type of curriculum and instructional adaptations could not meet the intense needs of students with severe behavioral and learning problems, as the findings of the study indicate. As the special education teacher noted: "It is easier to teach 10 LBD students than to teach one BD kid and 24 normal students, because it is easier to meet the BD kids' needs if you work with a group of them". Nevertheless, full inclusion, as the findings of the study indicate, remains an appropriate service option for students with mild learning disabilities, and various adaptations in the regular classrooms are conducive for their

learning.

The results of the study also indicate that full inclusion of students with severe learning disabilities and/or behavior disorders has serious impact upon learning of students without disabilities: the instructional plans could not be accomplished, the teachers had to stop teaching too frequently and deal with one or two students with severe learning and behavioral problems for too much time each day. These findings show that students with severe behavioral disorders and/or learning disabilities, students without disabilities and regular teachers did not benefit from full inclusion program. Apparently, it is necessary for educators to take into account the learning needs of students both with and without disabilities when placements are being considered. It is also important to take into account the severity of disabilities of students to be included. Severe disabilities mean intense needs. Whether the intense needs can be met in the fully inclusive programs must be addressed in placement considerations. This actually boils down to the issue of providing quality education to students with and without disabilities.

As the process of this project suggests, educational administrators (state level and school level) have much more enthusiasm toward full inclusion than teachers. In this case, the school principal initiated the project. The teachers and parents played passive roles in the decision making process: whether to fully include students with behavioral disorders and/or severe

learning disabilities. Apparently, as long as full inclusion remains politically popular, it is to be easily adopted by administrators than by teachers. As literature and findings of this study suggest, adoption of full inclusion is not based on the consideration of meeting the intense individual needs of students with disabilities, the needs of students without disabilities, and the ability of regular teachers to handle the severe learning and behavioral problems of the fully included students with disabilities, but on some philosophy of promoting social development of the students with all types of disabilities.

The findings of this study also suggest that it is important for those fully inclusive schools to timely evaluate the effectiveness of their full inclusion programs since the adoption of such practice is based on some philosophical assumption, not on scientific evidence. It is not a responsible act by adopting a new practice without addressing its effectiveness.

This experimental full inclusion project was initiated and implemented by the school personnel. The applied behavior analysis method was not utilized, no detailed and controlled documentation on students' learning and behavior outcomes was available. Only two participating teachers kept records (using the anecdotal method) on the more serious disruptive incidents of the included students. Most of the data of the study were collected through interviews with the participating teachers, which may constitute a limitation to the interpretations of the

findings. Thus this project may need to be treated as a quasi-experimental type of study.

Conclusions

The findings of this experimental full inclusion project indicate that students with severe learning disabilities and behavioral disorders could not benefit academically and behaviorally from the full inclusion service, even with the collaborative activities, adapted curriculum, adapted instructional procedures, classroom behavior management strategies and preparation of the regular education teachers. The learning of the students without disabilities was affected because of the daily frequent disruptions by students with severe learning disabilities and/or behavior disorders. However, full inclusion service with necessary instructional adaptations, procedural changes and classroom behavior management strategies appears to meet the basic needs of the students with mild learning disabilities.

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